

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

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USDAO KINSHASA NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 494

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR, GB

SUBJ: ASSISTNACE TO LOCATE DOWNED HELICOPTER

REF: LIBREVILLE 481

1. FOREIGN MINISTER MARTIN BONGO TELEPHONED CHARGE LATE AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 24 STATING HE WAS CALLING NOT ONLY IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY BUT "AS THE PRESIDENT'S NEPHEW FROM THE PRESIDENCY FOR THE PRESIDENT." BONGO STATED PRESIDENT HAD LEARNED THAT USG AIRCRAFT AIDING IN SEARCH FOR DOWNED HELICOPTER WAS PLANNING TO RETURN TO KINSHASA AND PROCEEDED MAKE EMOTIONAL, AT ONE POINT SEMI-THREATENING, PLEA THAT IT CONTINUE THE SEARCH AT LEAST THROUGH SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26. THE DOWNED HELICOPTER IS NOT MERELY SIMPLE AFFAIR OF GABONESE MILITARY, BONGO STATED, BUT A PERSONAL MATTER FOR THE PRESIDENT "BECAUSE OF LTC DJOUE DABANY AND ANOTHER YOUNG LIEUTENANT WHO IS A PETIT FRERE." THEN IN A RATHER CLUMSY MANNER BONGO STATED THAT IF GABON'S TRADITIONAL FRIENDS, FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES, DID NOT HELP OUT IN SUCH A CASE, GABON WOULD HAVE TO INVITE IN "THE OTHER SIDE."

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2. CHARGE EXPLAINED TO FOREIGN MINISTER THAT US CREW HAD DISCUSSED TIMING ITS DEPARTURE THAT MORNING WITH COLONEL ROUX WHO IS DIRECTING THE SEARCH BUT, THAT AS RESULT APPEAL FROM GENERAL BA OUMAR, HAD ALREADY AGREED TO STAY UNTIL SATURDAY AND TO REVIEW THE SITUATION ON DAY BY DAY BASIS. BONGO, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM OAU CONFERENCE AND REALLY DID NOT UNDERSTAND HOW EFFORT BEING

RUN, HAD HAD IMPRESSION THAT AMERICANS WERE CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT SEARCH. HE CALMED DOWN SOMEWHAT WHEN HE UNDERSTOOD THAT US AIRCRAFT FLEW MISSIONS OVER SPECIFIC ZONES AS ASSIGNED BY GABONESE MILITARY. CHARGE EXPLAINED THAT THERE WOULD COME A TIME WHEN FURTHER AIR SEARCH WOULD BE FUTILE. BONGO ACCEPTED THAT AND SUGGESTED THAT WHEN THAT TIME CAME, WE SHOULD TELEPHONE PRESIDENCY, EXPLAIN THAT THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE WHICH THE US AIRCRAFT WOULD USEFULLY DO, AND SEEK ACCORD FOR AIRCRAFT'S DEPARTURE. FOREIGN MINISTER MADE IT CLEAR THAT PRESIDENT BONGO CONSIDERED IT HIS PREROGATIVE MAKE THAT DECISION, NOT OURS, AND THAT WE SHOULD NOT MAKE GABONESE ANGRY BY ACTING ON OUR OWN. CHARGE EXPLAINED AGAIN THAT US AIRCRAFT WAS PARTICIPATING WITHIN SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATION BEING DIRECTED BY GABONESE AUTHORITIES AND NOT INDEPENDENTLY.

3. BY END CONVERSATION FOREIGN MINISTER WAS CONSIDERABLY MORE RELAXED, GRACIOUS AND APPRECIATIVE US EFFORTS. HE ALSO MADE ONE FINAL PLEA THAT AIRCRAFT REMAIN THROUGH SUNDAY. CHARGE REPEATED THAT AIRCRAFT, WHICH WAS AT THAT MOMENT ENGAGED IN SEARCH OPERATION, ON BASIS EARLIER APPEAL ALREADY COMMITTED STAY ON ADDITIONAL DAY AND THAT WE SHOULD REVIEW SITUATION FOLLOWING DAY. BONGO AGREED, THANKED CHARGE FOR US UNDERSTANDING, GAVE HIS HOME PHONE NO AND SAIDCALL ANYTIME, DAY OR NIGHT, IF WE NEEDED HIM.
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4. FOLLOWING BASED ON DATT ANALYSIS: TIME IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING WHEN FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN THE SEARCH AND RESCUE EFFORT FOR THE DOWNED GABONESE MUST BE ASSESSED AS BEING FRUITLESS BY ANY LOGIC. WE ARE NOW IN DAY SIX SINCE THE LOSS OF THE SUBJECT HELICOPTER. USDAO ENTERED THE SEARCH EFFORT ON DAY THREE AND HAS COVERED OVER 600 SQUARE NAUTICAL MILES OF AREA. PARENTHETICALLY, OTHER IMPORTANT COMMENTS ARE CRYING FOR DAO ATTENTION. TERRAIN AND VEGATATION CHARACTERISTICS IN CRASH AREA MAKE DISCOVERY OF DOWNED HELICOPTER HIGHTLY IMPROBABLE UNDER EXISTING SEARCH CONDITIONS BARRING A STROKE OF EXTREME GOOD FURTUNE. THE ENTIRE AREA IS THREE CANOPY JUNGLE, A GREEN ATLANTIC OCEAN AS IT WERE. INFRARED IMAGERY WITHIN THE FIRST 24 TO 48 HOURS AFTER CRASH COULD HAVE TURNED UP POSITIVE RESULTS BUT OBVIOUSLY NO SUCH TECHNOLOGY IS AVAILABLE. DATT PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT STANDS ON THE POINT THAT DISCOVERY OF THE WRECKAGE AND OR SURVIVORS IS NOW ALMOST PURELY MATTER OF CHANCE.

5. DUE CREDIT SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE GAVONESE AIR

FORCE, ESPECIALLY IN THE PERSON OF COL. ROUX, WHO IS THE COORDINATOR OF THE SEARCH. BOTH HE AND GEN BA-OUMAR ARE INTELLIGENT, AGGRESSIVE, AND CAPABLE PEOPLE. THEY ARE ALSO REALISTS WHO, PRESSURE FROM THE PRESIDENCY ASIDE, UNDERSTAND THE SAME PROFESSIONAL FACTORS WHICH CONSTITUTE THE DATTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION. GENERAL BA OUMAR TOLD CHARGE THAT PRESENCE US AIRCRAFT NOW PRIMARILY PSYCHOLOGICAL BECAUSE ITS DEPARTURE WILL SIGNAL ABANDONMENT OF HOPE.

6. FOR USDAO KINSHASA: PLEASE HAVE MRS GRIFFEN EMPHASIZE COL GRIFFIN'S REGRET IN THE EVENT HE IS UNABLE TO KEEP SUNDAY AFTERNOON APPOINTMENT WITH LOCAL BUSINESSMEN.
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7. CHARGE AND DATT COLLABORATED IN DRAFTING OF AND CONCUR ON CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE. YATES

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